

**David Carter and Roger Osborne. *Australian Books and Authors in the American Marketplace 1840s–1940s*. Sydney: Sydney UP, 2018. 300pp
A\$50.00
ISBN: 978-1-74332-581-0**

Despite its prosaic title, David Carter and Roger Osborne's book delivers on its promise of an erudite, expansive, and engaging study of the fortunes of Australian books and authors in the American marketplace in the years spanning the 1840s to 1940s. Not simply a significant contribution to the history of Australian fiction and publishing, Carter and Osborne's volume explores the commercial dynamics, opportunities and hurdles for Australian writers and publishing houses that sought to break into what was from the end of the nineteenth century the most lucrative publishing market in the world. Henry Lamond's remark in 1945 was probably true for much of the period examined in this book: 'The Yank literary market is absolutely the best in the whole blinkin' world.' And Carter and Osborne provide rich detail of the efforts of Australians to exploit that marketplace. More than this, *Australian Books and Authors in the American Marketplace 1840s–1940s* examines the world of colonial and transatlantic publishing and the complex of networks, institutions, and dispositions that Australia authors and books were required to negotiate.

The justification for this study is made clear from the outset. Carter and Osborne write in their Introduction:

[T]he history of Australian books and authors in the United States remains very largely an untold story, not just in terms of numbers or often surprising critical or sales success of individual titles and careers, but also in terms of the cultural and commercial dynamics and the personal, professional and institutional networks linking Australian authors with American publishers or putting obstacles in their way. To tell this story is not just to add a new layer to Australian literary history but to unsettle and reconfigure some of the foundational assumptions of that history. Once we add America into the picture things start to move, to shift beyond the framework of the national culture and the singular relationship between imperial Centre and colonial outpost. (2)

Concentrating primarily on works of fiction, and deploying non-restrictive definitions of the terms 'Australian author' and 'Australian book,' the nine chapters examine the careers of individual writers and texts, as well as the shifts in literary fashion as different genres and market sectors came in and out of vogue. Chapter 1, for example, considers the entry of Australian fiction and travel writing in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century. Carter and Osborne emphasise the way the 'Australian stories' that managed to find a place in the American marketplace were notable 'for their sameness and their difference, readily accommodated within Anglo-American romance and adventure conventions and yet different enough to have American publishers, reviewers and readers take note and to draw Australian books and authors together as Australian' (49). Chapter 2 examines the careers of Rosa Praed and Louis Becke, both of whom received acclaim in the marketplace but who faced a range of challenges to maintaining their reputations and audiences. These challenges related to the dynamics of their outputs and the changing values ascribed to romance and realism, as well as to the intricacies of the copyright regimes that their works faced.

Chapter 3 discusses writers and texts at the turn of the century, and how careers and individual works interacted with the fortunes of emerging genres like crime. Chapter 4 examines the fortunes of Australian books and writers in the US marketplace in the first three decades of the twentieth century in light of the introduction of US international copyright law, and the rise of market sectors such as ‘the geographical romance,’ ‘women’s travel writing,’ ‘the modern girl story’ and the ‘modern sex novel.’ Chapter 5 returns to the successes of Australia authors in the 1920–1940s in the crime and romance genre, focussing on the careers of Arthur Upfield and Maysie Grieg. The next few chapters chart the careers of ‘literary’ authors such as Henry Handel Richardson and Katharine Susannah Prichard (Chapter 6), authors of notable historical fictions and epics like Eleanor Dark, Dorothy Cottrell, M. Barnard Eldershaw, G.B. Lancaster, Helen Simpson, Xavier Herbert, and Brian Penton (Chapter 7), and Christina Stead and Patrick White (Chapter 8). The final chapter looks at the years following World War 2, and the waning, despite some notable successes, of interest in Australian books.

While never represented in large volume, Australian writers and books fared well in the American marketplace in the final years of the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth. Carter and Osborne note that ‘around one thousand editions of novels with a significant Australian connection were published in book form in the United States to 1950. This total comprises more than 760 different works, many in multiple editions, and almost certainly underestimates the number of reissues of individual titles. Around 250 different authors appear from around 200 American publishing houses or major imprints’ (4). While concerned with tracing the careers of specific authors and their works in the American marketplace, the book simultaneously examines the ‘economic, legal and institutional forces shaping the American publishing industry and the transatlantic book trade, and shifts in taste and the language of literary appreciation that affected the publishing opportunities for Australian authors’ (5).

Running through the volume are a number of other intersecting themes: the dependency of colonial networks and transatlantic arrangements in facilitating or frustrating the entrance of Australian authors and books into the North American marketplace; the shifts in the ‘value’ of Australian-ness for Australian books in the 100 years that the study addresses; the agency (and its limits) of authors seeking to profit from the US in a highly competitive, even fickle market; and the role of critics, reviews, and reader networks (such as the Book-of-the-Month Club).

David Carter and Roger Osborne have produced a highly readable, deeply interesting and provocative study of the fortunes of Australian literature. If as they argue, ‘Australia’s place in the world republic of letters needs a new trigonometry,’ then their book has provided a powerful mapping of a vital segment of Australian literary history, and one that will provide a new set of coordinates for future researchers.

Robert Clarke, University of Tasmania